



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR

# EXPRESSING EMOTION: MYTHS, REALITIES, AND THERAPEUTIC STRATEGIES

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The myth of emotional venting—that people have to “let their feelings out”—persists in popular lore and clinical culture despite substantial empirical evidence to the contrary. Why do you think this myth is so pervasive and persistent?

The authors posit that nonexpression can occur for a variety of reasons: a high distress threshold, motivated lack of awareness, skills deficits in labeling or interpreting emotions, negative attitudes toward emotions leading to an evaluation of the response as unacceptable, or no appropriate social context for expression. What (if any) therapeutic approaches would these different types of nonexpression warrant?

How might you distinguish a lack of distress versus a motivated lack of awareness of distress?

How can expression lead to self-understanding?

The authors talk about a broad range of forms of expression, from facial expression, to verbal expression, to expressive writing. How are the effects of these similar? How are they different?

One risk of expressing distress to others is that they might respond in rejecting ways. What are some other risks?

On pages 143-144, the authors describe research about how girls versus women signal sexual interest. What do you think causes these differences? Do you think boys have a similar developmental progression?

The responses of others can make a big difference in whether expression has positive or negative outcomes. Describe an example of a time that a client's expression elicited helpful responses from significant others. Describe an example of a time when a client's expression elicited critical or unhelpful responses.

The authors state that the paradox of distress expression is that expression is both a sign of distress and a possible way of coping with that distress. What are the clinical implications of this paradox?

The media emphasizes differences in expressivity between men and women. However, how visible these differences are depends on the context. For instance, counter to stereotypes, when instructed to do so, male friends can have emotionally intimate conversations, and in close relationships, the majority of both men and women report that they disclose "fully" to their partners. How do you see gender impacting on expressivity? Do you think it's harder for men than women to express their feelings? Are emotionally expressive men judged differently than emotionally expressive women?

When people have strong emotional reactions, they may express them, even if it's the last thing they want to do. Clinically, how have you handled this response?

Research shows that there are three components in rapport: 1) mutual attentiveness, 2) positivity, and 3) interpersonal coordination. How are these components relevant to establishing therapeutic rapport? Which is the most difficult to achieve in interactions with new clients?

What factors do you think influence how others respond to the expression of distress?

In our society today, do you think more people err on the side of overexpression or underexpression? Or do you think the issue is quality, not quantity?

What do you think are the characteristics of adaptive expression?

How do you think people develop a particular expressive style? How easy or difficult is it to change expressive style? What might inspire someone to want to change expressive style?